



June 12, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500  
Fax: 202 456-3348

Dear Mr. President,

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA)<sup>1</sup> represents the interests of saltwater anglers and related businesses from coast to coast. Our view on saltwater fishing, which according to the U.S. Department of Commerce is America's number one pastime, is based on a tradition as old as the foundation of our great nation.

Traditional recreational fishing access has always been and must always be open and free to all anglers. A recent proposal by a Texas-based conservation group was entered on the record at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for future discussion. The document suggests that recreational fishing should be considered under "*a catch shares program*," which your administration strongly favors in the management of the commercial fishing sector.

Although we have seen no formal position from your administration regarding recreational catch shares, we are concerned that the environmental groups are seeking to kill our open access tradition with little thought to impact such actions will have on coastal communities and individual freedoms. RFA has no formal position on the commercial sector's catch share proposal, as of yet. Their sector's leadership will ultimately decide what direction their industry needs to go. The RFA will, however, continue to monitor that process as allocation issues emerge.

As far as the recreational fishing community is concerned, the majority of saltwater anglers and the businesses that depend on and cater to those recreational anglers need to enjoy an open access system that is managed under fishing seasons, size limits and bag limits. This system needs some improvement, but the management process can be made to work well and remains the cornerstone of America's recreational fishery and the real "free market approach" to managing our nation's fisheries.

Mr. President, there is no place for "catch shares" or "individual fishing quotas" (IFQ) within the recreational fishing sector. An IFQ or catch share fishery for recreational fishing would collapse our

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<sup>1</sup> The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) is a national, 501(c)(4) non-profit grassroots political action organization that has been representing individual sport fishermen and the sport fishing industry since 1996. The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs and ensure the long-term sustainability of U.S. saltwater fisheries. RFA members include individual anglers, boat builders, fishing tackle manufacturers, party and charter boat businesses, bait and tackle retailers, marinas, and many other businesses in fishing communities.

coastal businesses, from the marinas, tackle shops, boat dealers, and for-hire industry, on along to the restaurants, hotels, gas stations and grocery stores which rely on a vibrant tourism boost from recreational fishing activity. Such impacts will not be exclusive to the seaside regions, as the trickle-up effect to wholesalers and manufacturers would also be immediately felt in the heartland.

NOAA's own estimates report that over 13 million recreational anglers spent \$5.8 billion on fishing trips and \$25.6 billion on durable fishing-related equipment in 2006, contributing more than \$82 billion in sales to the U.S. economy. The power of the recreational fishing industry supports over 500,000 jobs, and generates over \$38 billion in value-added impacts each year. This new scheme for the privatization of our nation's marine resources would be devastating to our overall economy, and flies in the face of the public trust doctrine which protects the interest and rights of the public to free access of marine and riparian places for fishing and navigation.

Mr. President, the current federal fisheries law (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act) has provisions in it which are not based on sound science and are actually arbitrary in nature. These troubling provisions in the current law are causing severe access problems for recreational anglers in many instances along our coasts. Red snapper, a primary fishery from North Carolina through Florida and all along the Gulf of Mexico, is about to be shut down because of flawed science. Catch shares are not the answer. These problems in Magnuson need to be addressed immediately by Congress through a legislative and science based solution.

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) as well as New York Senator Charles Schumer have introduced legislation which would help open the door for Magnuson reform, but they are meeting strong resistance from environmental groups claiming to want fisheries managed under sound science, where in actuality these groups are supporting a "fatally flawed" (according to the National Research Council) process. The spin from these groups is that their bills will allow for overfishing to occur. However, the word "overfishing" is an ambiguous term; we actually have healthy rebuilding occurring on stocks like red snapper and summer flounder, yet it's still framed as "overfishing" because of the current statutory definition. Ironically, overfishing can even occur with no fishing at all.

Conservation, access, and harvest can all be synonymous; but timeframes must be adjusted when rebuilding progress is being made in order to let fishing communities and their related businesses survive. Our Board would be happy to sit down and discuss our communities' specific needs, in hopes that we can maintain traditional recreational fishing access that would be consistent with the public trust doctrine and also allow fishing and fisheries rebuilding to occur simultaneously.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet personally with Secretary of Commerce Locke and NOAA Administrator Lubchenco to discuss our concerns and review some of the initiatives we believe would help improve the future of our fisheries as we ensure access for anglers and marine industries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jim Donofrio  
Executive Director